

By the Numbers

I. Preamble & Prayer

A. Gary Kelly's Greeting

- ❖ Where did I get the sermon title for today's message?
- ❖ Well, would you believe it came from a leader of a favorite company of mine?
- ❖ Southwest Airlines—Based in Dallas Texas, its Chairman and CEO, Gary Kelly entitled his Gary's Greeting in the September 2018 issue of Southwest The Magazine, by the title of today's message
- ❖ So, yes, I like Gary's title and became inspired by a sentence he wrote in the greeting, here it is—

"I tell our Employees *numbers matter* because the only way we can continue to provide job security for our People and take care of them is if we are financially prosperous—last year was our 45th consecutive year of profitability..."

B. Valley by the Numbers

- ❖ I became inspired then to look at our Valley Church, by way of the numbers
- ❖ Through August 2018 our year to date **church budget income is \$91,000 with our church budget expenses being \$90,500**
- ❖ I share this because in a few weeks I will begin my 8th year here at Valley as servant to the His Bride
- ❖ And we have been in the black with our income/expense sheet almost every month without fail
- ❖ Using Gary Kelly's words, *numbers matter*, why? Because—
 - a. The numbers never lie
 - b. It's all in the numbers
 - c. Trust the numbers
- ❖ Through August 2018 Valley Church's year to date tithe is **\$160,000—we're on pace to exceed \$200,000 in tithe for the 6th year running**
- ❖ And the tithe per capita—meaning the **number of people tithing today has increased markedly in 2018 at Valley**

C. Does life by the numbers always work out?

- ❖ Does life by the numbers always work out?
- ❖ Well think about it, you could—
 - a. Count correctly and understand the 2300 day prophecy and countdown to Messiah the Prince correctly
 - b. Pin down your choice for the antichrist
 - c. But then, you could get caught up acting like a goat and get counted as a goat rather than a sheep
 - d. Forget that you lose your life in order to find it
 - e. Only to discover that when you've gone missing yourself—Jesus begins appearing

D. Four things we'll be unpacking in today's message

1 – Life is more than the four points of the Compass

- ❖ There are four points on any human compass
- ❖ Threats can come from any or all those four points of the compass
- ❖ But for the Believer there's another direction that always counts

2 – More than gods abound

- ❖ There are gods that abound in our world
- ❖ All makes, all sizes, all available
- ❖ But for the Believer there's another very important choice

3 – Is Worship for the weak and war for the strong?

- ❖ People like to fight first as a show of their strength
- ❖ Seems people who worship are just trying to mask or hide their fears and weaknesses
- ❖ Where is the truth? Who is right?
- ❖ Which are we to be? War-minded or worship-minded?

4 – Living life by the numbers

- ❖ Do they always add up?
- ❖ Are there times when having the numbers on your side are not as important as having God on your side?
- ❖ Could it be that settling whose number one...is our greatest test?

E. Prayer Song – He's Got the Whole World in His Hands (tiny babies, you and me) Jesus Never Fails

II. Message

A. Jesus Christ

- ❖ TEXT: Hebrews 13:7 NLT

“Remember your leaders who taught you the word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives and follow their example of faith.”

- ❖ By the numbers—we here at Valley over the past 33 months have laid to rest 17 souls in Jesus
- ❖ We've also experienced 17 souls coming to New Life in Jesus over that same period through either baptism or profession of faith
- ❖ Oh we've grown numerically—a net transfer growth of 4 over that period
- ❖ You might be saying, “Well that's not much growth, Pastor!”
- ❖ And you know you'd be right, if going by the number 4 was all God and we went by at Valley
- ❖ He doesn't and neither do we
- ❖ I would like for us to number the number one reason for experiencing growth spiritually—
- ❖ TEXT: Hebrews 13:8 NLT

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.”

- ❖ Put it down—going by the numbers, Jesus stays the same
- ❖ Meaning, with Jesus there is no variation, no turning, no difference—He is constant
- ❖ But for us, he doesn't permit us to stay the same ourselves, He intends that we grow
- ❖ Which lead us to the next verse here in Hebrews 13
- ❖ TEXT: Hebrews 13:9 NLT

“So do not be attracted by strange, new ideas. Your strength comes from God’s grace, not from rules about food, which don’t help those who follow them.”

- ❖ By the numbers, remember, where does your strength come from?
- ❖ God’s grace!
- ❖ Not by less of this and more of that which you might eat
- ❖ God’s grace—God’s unmerited favor upon us is what changes us and grows us! AMEN!
- ❖ I have watched over the past 7 years how God has reshaped the culture here at Valley at least three times
- ❖ And in each reshaping God’s grace has grown His body here at Valley

B. Growth is by God’s Grace

- ❖ Scripture Lesson: Numbers 1:45 NLT “The total number of men, 20 years old and older was 603,550...”
- ❖ Not that the women and children didn’t matter, just that these were the men able to go to war
- ❖ What are we to be? War-minded or worship-minded?
- ❖ Well, there is certainly a spiritual battle being waged, so perhaps there is a fight of faith if our strength is to come by God’s grace! AMEN!
- ❖ I would like to have us go to the book of 2 Chronicles and begin with chapter 29 as we apply this message today
- ❖ It’s the story of King Hezekiah and his reign over Judah

III. Application

A. Hezekiah reopens the Temple

- ❖ Hezekiah’s reign followed that of his father, Ahaz, who had shut the doors of the Lord’s Temple
- ❖ I can remember when I came here to Valley as interim pastor in May 2011
- ❖ I followed Pastor Vadim, and yet he along with myself had heard again and again of some people’s idea that Valley Church would ultimately be closing
- ❖ A new church was going up nearby and this one would close and everyone could go to the new church
- ❖ But even before I ever knew of a church existing in Sun City, now called Menifee—I passed by out here on the freeway in 2010 and thought—there ought to be a church here in this area
- ❖ Thank God there already was a church—already growing, ready to thrive even more! AMEN! (pause)
- ❖ Well back to our story—Ahaz had done a number when he closed the Lord’s Temple
- ❖ He had filled the Lord’s Temple with all kinds of foreign objects—defiling the temple
- ❖ TEXT: 2 Chron. 29:3,11,12a,15-17 READ

- ❖ By the numbers, it took them 16 days to empty and cleanse the temple
- ❖ Once they had done this work, they did a recall of all the items that King Ahaz had tried to dispose of...
- ❖ Amazing! Services were resumed, and look at verse 31 of 2 Chron. 29
- ❖ TEXT: 2 Chron. 29:31

“So the people brought their sacrifices and thanksgiving offerings, and all whose hearts were willing brought burnt offerings, too.”

- ❖ Do you see what’s happening? Hezekiah could be numbering his men for war, but instead he is numbering them for worship
- ❖ We need more priests, we need more leaders in the Lord’s Temple
- ❖ This is the call we need to offer up to God here at Valley—not go to war, but go to worship
- ❖ Put it down friend, every time the Lord’s Temple has come under fire and people question coming to the Lord’s house
- ❖ That’s a time to return to the Lord and serving Him and Him alone!
- ❖ Hezekiah then prepares his people to celebrate the Passover—and since the numbers didn’t add up, they were short of priests, Hezekiah set the Passover date for a month later than Moses and Israel of old had originally set
- ❖ Now watch--

B. Hezekiah’s Letter

- ❖ TEXT: 2 Chron. 30:6-10 READ
- ❖ Letters of invitation were carried to the far reaches of Judah and Israel
- ❖ And it says, ***“But most of the people just laughed at the runners and made fun of them.”***
- ❖ When you’re trying to follow what God wants you to do, the majority will not respond favorably, but rather rudely
- ❖ But here’s the important fact, in verse 11 – ***“Some people from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem.”***
- ❖ Going by the numbers, there were some who responded to the invitation
- ❖ But something else was occurring at the same time in Judah, in Jerusalem
- ❖ We find it in the next verse, verse 12, 2 Chron. 30
- ❖ TEXT: 2 Chron. 30:12

“At the same time, God’s hand was on the people in the land of Judah, giving them all one heart to obey the orders of the king (Hezekiah) and his officials, who were following the word of the Lord.”

- ❖ A marvelous celebration of the Passover occurred
- ❖ In fact they had such a wonderful time, we read in verse 23, 2 Chron. 30 these words

“The entire assembly then decided to continue the festival another seven days, so they celebrated joyfully for another week.”

- ❖ And would you believe it, King Hezekiah was right in step, and by the numbers, gave the people all the bulls, sheep and goats they would need to make offerings
- ❖ Let me refer you to the weekly quote found in our bulletin this morning—it is most appropriate right here...

“God has not put any kingly power in our ranks to control this or that branch of the work. The work has been greatly restricted by the effort to control it in every line...if the work had not been so restricted by an impediment here, and an impediment there, and on the other side an impediment, it would have gone forth in it majesty.” Ellen White in GC Bulletin, 1901, p. 26

- ❖ Hezekiah, although a king, is not trying to control but rather to stimulate revival in his kingdom of Judah and to the north in Israel
- ❖ What happens next is just religious reforms
- ❖ TEXT: 2 Chron. 31:1 READ
- ❖ All the sacred pillars, poles and shrines to pagan gods that Ahaz, Hezekiah’s father and the kings to the north in Israel had set
- ❖ The Passover festival ended and the people as they returned home, demolished these pagan sites and their images
- ❖ Friend, whatever has been taking the place of worship to God himself in our lives will come crashing down, when we set about to worship God in Spirit and Truth

C. Hezekiah’s Appeal

- ❖ As the people returned home, Hezekiah did not stop, he continued to organize and follow the Lord God going forward
- ❖ TEXT: 2 Chron. 31:2-5 READ
- ❖ A tithe is a tenth, 10% and is the first share and given to the Lord
- ❖ And it goes to priests and Levites—in our case the ministers and those ministering at the house of the Lord
- ❖ The tithes and offerings came in...let’s read in verse 12a
- ❖ TEXT: 2 Chron. 31:12a READ
- ❖ Reading verse 15 here in Chapter 31 it again is clear that the gifts as well as tithes went to help those in the local towns where ministry took place
- ❖ Our local Church Budget does not receive any tithe to support this local town parish or church—those funds are separate from tithe which goes to the local conference in Riverside and a portion of the tithe comes back to pay my salary and a portion to our secretary, Helen Tkalec
- ❖ We thank you for remembering this when you respond so generously each month (pause)
- ❖ I would be misleading you if we ended the message right here—because the story does not end here
- ❖ This is what it says happened next—
- ❖ TEXT: 2 Chron. 32:1 READ
- ❖ When God blesses a work as He did with Hezekiah, it’s at such a moment that the Evil One strikes
- ❖ You will remember in Hezekiah’s letter that went out by way of the runners, that he mentioned invaders and being taken captive
- ❖ Isaiah had made it clear time and again, that God would permit the invaders to come, if the people abandoned the Lord
- ❖ Israel to the north had and Assyria had already invaded Israel, now they were at Jerusalem’s gates
- ❖ Hezekiah took defensive actions—but most importantly he spoke encouraging words to his people
- ❖ TEXT: 2 Chron. 32:6b-8 READ
- ❖ Hezekiah went by the numbers

- ❖ He admitted to the people
 - a. The King of Assyria has a great army
 - b. But they are merely men
 - c. We have the Lord our God to 1) help us and to 2) fight our battles for us!

IV. Close

A. Unpack Four Truths

- ❖ I told you as we began today, we would unpack four important truths today

1. Life is more than the four points of the Compass

- ❖ There are four points on any human compass
- ❖ Threats can come from any or all those four points of the compass
- ❖ But for the Believer there's another direction that always counts first and foremost – **Above**

2 – More than gods abound

- ❖ There are gods that abound in our world
- ❖ All makes, all sizes, all available
- ❖ But for the Believer there's just one choice for the role of a god—it's the God of heaven

3 – Is Worship for the weak and war for the strong?

- ❖ People like to fight first as a show of their strength
- ❖ Seems people who worship are just trying to mask or hide their fears and weaknesses
- ❖ Where is the truth? Who is right?
- ❖ Which are we to be? War-minded or worship-minded?
- ❖ I urge you to choose to be worship-minded; you will never go wrong to start there and remain there

4 – Living life by the numbers

- ❖ Do they always add up?
- ❖ Are there times when having the numbers on your side are not as important as having God on your side?
- ❖ Could it be that settling whose number one...is our greatest test?
- ❖ Yes! Settle the question, Friend, make Him first
- ❖ You and I will never go wrong living by that number

- V. Prayer** – Lord God, you are shaping our lives by your Grace, through the power of the Holy Spirit. We would be in denial, if we said, our lives are not under attack, just like Hezekiah—a real-life attack. But they are merely men or women, and because we live by Your grace, we have You God on our side to help us not to freak out, but stay calm and in faith trust You to fight our battles for us! We're not going to run, not going to leave this body of Christ. Instead, we want to grow as never before. And if it's going to be by the numbers—we're going to need to reduce our baggage to "one" and let You be our everything, our all. It's only then that we can get life right. In the name of Jesus, we pray... And all God's people said, "AMEN!"